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THE
PREHISTORIC RACES OF ITALY,

BY

CANON ISAAC TAYLOR.

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THE PRE-HISTORIC RACES OF ITALY.*

By Canon ISAAC TAYLOR.

Nowhere in the world is there such a mixture of races—such a *colluvies gentium*—as in Italy.

At the beginning of the historic period we find Siculi and Sicani in the south, Etruscans in the north, and in the center Umbrians, Latins, Sabines, and Samnites, all speaking Aryan languages. At a very early time the Carthaginians made good their footing in the west of Sicily, and the Greeks established colonies in the east. Southern Italy became **Magna Græcia**—so that the greater Greece lay beyond the Adriatic, just as the greater Britain now lies beyond the Atlantic. The Greeks pushed their trading posts as far as Cumæ in the Bay of Naples, and the Phœnicians established theirs at Cære, 20 miles from Rome.

In the fourth century B. c. the Gauls poured over the Alps into the plain of the Po, establishing a Gallia Cisalpina in the north answering to the **Magna Græcia** in the south.

And then, when the Roman legions had conquered Italy and the Eastern World, Rome herself was overrun by the peoples she had subdued. Rome became an oriental city. The Orontes, as a Roman writer complained, had emptied itself into the Tiber. A flood of Syrians, Jews, Greeks, Egyptians, Africans, Spaniards, Gauls, and Dacians—slaves, freedmen, or adventurers—poured into the Eternal City, making it a *cloaca maxima*—the universal sewer of the world. Then came the inroads of the northern hordes—Heruls, Goths, Vandals, Huns, and Lombards—who rushed in to appropriate the treasures which during four centuries had been plundered from Africa and Asia. Next came the inroads of Normans, Moors, Spaniards, French, and Germans, and lastly, the peaceable invasion of winter residents.

These are the races which, in historic times, have been added to the pre-historic peoples of the land.

At the beginning of the historic period we find the Etruscans established north of the Tiber, the Latins and other tribes speaking Aryan languages further to the south, and an earlier aboriginal population in the Apennines and Calabria.

In books written only 30 years ago the oldest civilization of Italy is attributed to a mysterious people, who are called the Pelasgi. We

* From *The Contemporary Review*, August, 1890, vol. LVIII, pp. 261-270.

hear of these Pelasgi in Greece as well as in Italy. Those megalithic structures which still excite our wonder—the walls of Mycenæ and Tiryns, as well as those of Cortona and Russellæ—are called Pelasgic. Cære and Cortona are said to have been Pelasgic cities prior to the Etruscan conquest. We must therefore begin by asking who were these Pelasgi. The modern doctrine, it is hardly needful to say, is that the word has no ethnological significance, the name Pelasgic being merely equivalent to “ancient” or “aboriginal.” The term was a term of ignorance, like the word “natives” now applied to Polynesians, Patagonians, Red Indians, or Maoris. We may therefore leave the Pelasgians out of account; or rather, try and find out what races were grouped together by ancient writers under this convenient but delusive appellation.

What we may call “the ethnological horizon” has wonderfully widened of late years. For vast periods, for many millenniums, we are able to trace the history of man in Europe. He is now proved to have been the contemporary of the great extinct carnivora and pachyderms, and to have followed northward the retreating ice sheet of the last glacial epoch. The history of these primeval races has been traced by the tools and weapons which they have left, and by the shape and character of their skulls.

Archæologists have distinguished the successive ages of stone, bronze, and iron. The bronze age in Italy is believed to have commenced some 4,000 years ago. The stone age, which preceded it, is divided into two epochs, the Palæolithic age, or age of chipped flints, and the Neolithic age, when the flint implements were ground or polished. The Palæolithic people were utter savages, clad in skins, living in caves or rock shelters, making use of no fixed sepulchers, subsisting on shell fish or the products of the chase, ignorant of pottery, without bows and arrows, and armed merely with spears, tipped with flint, horn, or bone.

Skulls which are believed to be of Palæolithic age have been found in various parts of Italy—at Olmo, at Isola del Liri, at Mentone, and in some Sicilian caves. They are all dolichocephalic, or long skulls. Owing to the presence in their refuse heaps of human bones which seem to have been broken in order to extract the marrow, it is believed that these people occasionally practised cannibalism. But their chief food seems to have consisted of wild horses of a small breed, which then roamed over Europe in immense herds. Enormous refuse heaps, consisting mainly of the bones of horses, have been found outside the caves which were inhabited by this race. In the caves at the foot of Monte Pellegrino, near Palermo, the floor is formed by a magma of the bones of wild horses, which were either stalked with spears, driven by the hunters into pit-falls, or chased over the cliffs. Similar deposits have been found at the cave of Thäyngen, in Switzerland, and in front of the rock shelter at Solutré, near Macon, where there is a vast de-

posit, the relics of the feasts of these savages, nearly 10 feet in thickness and more than 300 feet in length, composed entirely of the bones of horses, and comprising the remains of from 20,000 to 40,000 individuals.

The Palæolithic period must have lasted for unnumbered millenniums. Archæologists conjecture that it came to an end some 20,000 years ago, when it was succeeded by the Neolithic period, which may have lasted for some 16,000 years. At the beginning of the Neolithic age, when regular sepulchers were first used, we find savages, who may probably be the descendants of the Palæolithic people, spread over western Europe. They were clad in skins, stitched together with bone needles. They wore bracelets of shells, and painted or tattooed their bodies with red oxide of iron. Broca considers that this early race is allied to the North African tribes, their language probably belonging to the Hamitic class, without inflexions and almost without grammar.

To us the chief interest of these people lies in the fact that their descendants may probably be traced in the present inhabitants of Sardinia and of southern Italy, as well as in some parts of the British Islands and of Spain. They are usually called the Iberian race. In the early Neolithic period we find skulls of the Iberian type all over western Europe, in Caithness, Yorkshire, Wales, and Somerset, in the south of France, in Spain and Italy. This race was swarthy, with olive complexion and black curly hair; it was orthognathous, leptorhinic, and highly dolichocephalic, with a low orbital index, and short stature, averaging about 5 feet 4 inches. Their present descendants are found in Donegal, Galway, and Kerry, in some of the Hebrides, in Denbighshire, and in the counties bordering on Wales. They are also to be recognized among the Spanish Basques, the Berbers, the Kabyles, the Guanches of Teneriffe, the Corsicans, the Sardinians, the Sicilians, and the people of southern Italy. Pausanias informs us that the Sardinians were Libyans, or what we should now call Berbers. Seneca says that Corsica was peopled by Iberians and Ligurians. Thucydides and Ephorus also inform us that the oldest inhabitants of Sicily were Iberians.

There are several pre-historic skulls of this race in the Kincherian Museum at Rome, and the Falerian skull in the Villa Papa Giulio belongs to the same type. These skulls are orthognathous and dolichocephalic, resembling the modern Sardinian skull and ancient Iberian skulls found in caves at Gibraltar and in Sicily.

This ancient type is still predominant in southern Italy, Sicily, Sardinia, and Corsica. Professor Calori, of Modena, has measured more than 2,400 skulls in different provinces of Italy. In southern Italy only 36 per cent. are round-headed, with a cephalic index* above 80; whereas

* The cephalic index gives the proportion of the breadth of the head to the length, and is obtained by dividing the breadth by the length from front to back, and then multiplying by 100.

in northern Italy the proportion is 87 per cent. In northern Italy less than 1 per cent. are of the extreme Sardinian type, with the index below 74; while in southern Italy 17 per cent. belong to this type. The difference of race, as shown by the difference in the shape of the skull, may account to some extent for the difference in the existing civilization in the north and south of the peninsula.

Early in the Neolithic age, before the reindeer had withdrawn from Belgium, another race makes its appearance in Europe. They were a round-headed people of short stature, with a mean cephalic index of about 84. We first find their remains in the sepulchral caves of Belgium and central France, whence they extended to Savoy and to the Rhætian and Maritime Alps. They manufactured rude pottery; their weapons were axes of flint, carefully chipped and roughly polished, and spears tipped with bone or horn. The skull is of the same shape as that of the Lapps, whom they resembled in their short stature. Their original speech is probably represented by the Basque, and a few of their words may be preserved in mountain names of the Alpine region, such as *Cima*, "a hill," which is seen in the name of Cimiez near Nice, of the Cima de Jazi, and of the Cevennes. They are designated as the Auv-
ergnat, Rhætian, or Ligurian race.

In the early Neolithic period we find in Italy only these two races, the dolichocephalic, or long-headed, Iberian race, who are physically allied to the North African tribes, and the brachycephalic, or round-headed, Ligurian race, allied to the Lapps and Finns. These two races inhabited the same caves, together or in succession. Thus in a Neolithic cave at Monte Tignoso, near Livorno, two skulls were found, one of the Iberian type, with an index less than 71, and another of the Ligurian type, with an index of 92. In another Neolithic cave, called the Caverna della Matta, an Iberian skull was found with an index of 68, and a Ligurian skull with an index of 84. No anthropologist would admit that these skulls could have belonged to men of the same race.

We now come to the third Italian race, which may be called the Umbrian or Latin race. They spoke an Aryan language, and must be regarded as the ancestors of the Romans. They made their appearance in Europe at a much later time, probably not more than 6,000 or 7,000 years ago. They were taller and more powerful than either of the earlier races, and were orthocephalic, with an index of from 79 to 81. When we first meet with them, they are no longer mere savages, living solely by the chase, but are a pastoral people, who had domesticated the dog, the ox, and the sheep, and who had invented the canoe, and even the ox-wagon, in which they followed their herds over central Europe. They no longer, like the two earlier races, sheltered themselves in caves, but lived in huts made of boughs plastered with clay, and in winter in pit dwellings roofed with poles and twigs.

We can trace this race all over Central Europe. We find their remains in the round barrows of Britain, but more especially in the pile

dwellings which they erected in the lakes of Germany, Switzerland, and northern Italy.

From southern Germany they spread to western Switzerland, where we find the remains of their settlements in the lakes of Constance, Neufchâtel, Biènne, and Geneva. These Swiss settlements began in the stone age, but were in many cases continuously inhabited from the age of stone through the age of bronze, coming down, in a few cases, to the age of iron. We can trace these people advancing gradually in civilization, at first subsisting mainly on the chase of the stag and the wild boar, afterwards, as these beasts became scarce, depending more and more on their domesticated animals, the ox and the sheep, and gradually taming the goat, the pig, and the horse. At first we find them without cereals, and evidently ignorant of the rudest agriculture, laying up in earthen pipkins stores of acorns, hazel-nuts, and water-chestnuts; and then, after a time, growing barley, wheat, and flax, learning to spin and weave, to tan leather, and even to make boots. They are identified with the Helvetii, a Celtic people.

This race gradually extended itself to Italy, crossing the Alpine barrier either through Carniola or by one of the western passes, and occupying by degrees Venetia, Lombardy, and the Emilia, and finally, the whole valley of the Po.

When they first appear in Italy they were still in the stone age, and had domesticated the ox, but were ignorant of agriculture. Now the bronze age is believed to have begun in Italy not later than 1900 B. C., and therefore this Umbro Latin Aryan race must have entered Italy considerably more than two thousand years before the commencement of our era.

On arriving in Italy they built pile dwellings in the North Italian lakes, similar to the pile dwellings of Switzerland and southern Germany, and disclosing much the same stage of civilization. We cannot doubt that they belonged to the same race, and this is confirmed by the close connection between Celtic and Italic speech.

In Italy, as well as in Switzerland, the pile dwellings began in the age of stone and lasted down into the age of bronze. Many of the small lakes have been converted into peat-bogs, and in digging out the peat the remains of these settlements have been disclosed.

One of the settlements has been discovered in a peat moor at Mercurago, near Arona. This moor was formerly a shallow lake, in which a pile dwelling was built by some of the earliest settlers of the Umbro-Latin race. They had no knowledge of agriculture, but fed on hazel-nuts and wild cherries. They had rude pottery, and polished flint implements. A dug-out canoe, a disk of walnut wood, which had evidently formed the wheel of an ox-cart, and one bronze pin were found, showing that the settlement was not finally abandoned till the age of bronze had commenced.

Farther north, in the Lake of Varese, there are seven villages built

on piles, two of them large, with numerous huts, which might almost be called towns. One of these towns belongs entirely to the stone age, exhibiting no trace of metal, but with remains of the stag, ox, goat, and pig. The other was founded in the stone age, but survived into the age of bronze, a pin, a fish-hook, and two spear-heads, all of bronze, having been found.

Another large pile dwelling in the Lago de Garda, opposite Peschiera, was founded in the stone age, and was in continuous occupation through the age of copper to the age of bronze.

Perhaps the most instructive of these lake settlements is the pile dwelling in the Lake of Fimon, near Vicenza. It must have been founded very soon after the Umbrians first reached Italy, and was destroyed before they had passed from the pastoral to the agricultural stage of civilization. There are two successive relic-beds, separated by an interval, which shows that the earlier town was burned, and then, after a time, re-built. In the oldest bed there is no trace of agriculture, even of the rudest kind. The inhabitants lived chiefly by the chase, but had domesticated the ox and the sheep. The bones of the stag and the wild boar are extremely numerous, and these animals evidently formed the chief food of the people, the bones of the ox and the sheep being rare. There is no grain, and no cereals of any kind, but great stores of hazel-nuts have been found, together with water-chestnuts (*Trapa natans*), wild cherries, and stores of acorns. The acorns were roasted for food, as is proved by fragments adhering to earthen pipkins. Flint tools and rude pottery are found, but no trace of metal. The settlement was burned, and after a time re-built. The newer relic-bed contains numerous flint chips, and one bronze ax, showing that the age of metal had commenced. But the notable fact is, that at the time of this new settlement the people had passed from the hunting to the pastoral stage. Wild animals had now become scarce, bones of the stag are absent, and those of the wild boar are rare, but those of the ox and the sheep have become common. The agricultural stage had not however been reached when this second settlement was destroyed, the only farinaceous food being hazel-nuts, cornel, cherries, and acorns. The dwellings were round huts, built of wattle, and plastered with clay. The remains of a canoe have been found.

We learn therefore that when the Umbro-Latin people reached Italy they were ignorant of metals and of agriculture, living mainly by the chase, and on wild fruits, nuts, and acorns.

After the lakes at the foot of the Alps had been occupied, the population increased, and gradually extended itself southward, building pile dwellings in the marshes in the neighborhood of Mantua. The race next crossed the Po, erecting on dry land in the plain of the Emilia similar villages of pile dwellings, the remains of which are very numerous, and go by the name of *terre mare*. These *terre mare*, or "marl beds," are small knolls or elevations, rising a few feet above the plain,

and are most numerous in the provinces of Parma, Reggio, and Modena. They consist of beds of brownish or dark-colored earth, rich in phosphates and nitrates, and which are now used by the peasants for manuring their fields. They are plainly the refuse heaps or middens of ancient villages, which were pile dwellings erected on dry land. They vary from an acre to 3 or 4 acres in extent, and usually rise some 10 feet above the plain, resembling the Arab villages in Egypt, each standing on its *tell*, raised above the inundation. These knolls are composed solely of the refuse of habitation, of the bones of animals, and of broken pottery thrown out from the huts, which were built on platforms resting on piles. The lower strata of rubbish belong to the age of stone, while in many cases the upper strata belong to the age of bronze. They must have been occupied for many centuries, to allow of such vast accumulations of refuse. They were protected by a square earthen mound or rampart, surmounted by palisades, like a New Zealand *pah*.

These *terre mare*, of which nearly a hundred are known, disclose clearly the civilization of the first Aryan settlers in Italy, the ancestors of the Latin race. They made mats from the bark of the clematis; they knew how to prepare and to weave flax; they even obtained amber beads from the Baltic, but they possessed no swords, fibulæ, or rings. They had neither iron, gold, silver, nor glass. Bronze was cast, but not forged. We find strainers for preparing honey, and hand-mills or querns for grinding grain, but there is no sign of bread having been baked. The vine was cultivated, but the art of making wine had not been discovered. No idols of any kind have been found. Certain earthenware crescents, supposed at one time to have been symbols used for lunar worship, prove to be neck-rests, used for sleeping on the ground, so as to avoid disturbing the elaborate coiffure. The dwellings were merely huts of wattle and dab, no stone or mortar having been used in their construction. The people hunted the stag, the roe, and the wild boar, and kept dogs, oxen, sheep, goats, and pigs. They had no fowls. The ass was unknown, and it is doubtful whether they had tamed the horse. They had dishes perforated with holes, which were probably used for making cheese, but no fish-bones or fish-hooks have been found. They grew wheat, beans, and flax, and gathered wild apples, sloes, and cherries. Acorns were carefully preserved in jars for winter use.

These peaceful people must have inhabited the plain of the Po for at least a thousand years, probably for a much longer time, two or even three thousand years. They had advanced to the bronze age, and must be regarded as the ancestors of the Latins and the other Aryan tribes of Italy.

At some period in the bronze age they were suddenly overwhelmed by the invasion of the Etruscans, a fierce and savage race which broke in on them from the north. All their settlements were destroyed--not

one survived to the iron age, which probably commenced in Italy in the ninth or tenth century B. C. On other grounds it is believed that the Etruscan invasion was not later than the eleventh century B. C. We learn from Varro that the Etruscan era began 291 years before the Roman. The Roman era began in 753 B. C., and therefore the Etruscan era dates from 1044 B. C. But it is not likely that the Etruscan era began before the conquerors had settled down into an organized state—*duodecim populi Etruriae*, or confederation of the twelve Etruscan tribes. We may therefore, with some probability, place the Etruscan invasion of Italy in the twelfth century B. C. It may not improbably be connected with the great movement of races about this period, which began with the conquest of Syria by the Hittites, and of Egypt by the Hyksos, and ended with the Thessalian and Dorian invasions of Greece, and that consequent emigration of the older Greek tribes to Asia Minor which lies at the base of the Homeric Epos. It is possible that the Etruscans may themselves have been an Asiatic people, akin to the Kheta and the Hyksos. This supposition derives support from the similarity in the appearance of the Hittites and the Etruscans as portrayed on their respective monuments, from the old tradition which connects the Etruscans with Asia Minor, and also from the recent discovery in Lemnos of inscriptions believed to be in a language of the Etruscan type.

After overwhelming the Umbrian settlements in the valley of the Po, the Etruscans extended their dominion across the Apennines to the Arno and the Tiber. It seems probable that the foundation of Rome was due to the Umbro-Latin fugitives, who placed the Tiber as a barrier between themselves and the invaders, establishing themselves on the Palatine, as their Etruscan foes did at Veii, 11 miles north of Rome. Just as the foundation of Venice is attributed to the fugitives from the invasion of Attila and the Huns, so the foundation of Rome may be due to fugitives from the invasion of the Etruscans. This is supported by the fact that the *terra mare* and the *palafitte*, which are believed to constitute the primitive settlements of the Umbro-Latin Aryan race, are not found south of the Apennines beyond the Emilia and the valley of the Po. The Etruscan dominion and civilization endured for some 700 years. At length it fell before the invasion of the Gauls in 400 B. C., just as the Umbrian civilization had fallen before the inroad of the Etruscan hordes. And thus Etruria Circumpadana, the former Umbrian land, became cisalpine Gaul, its possession reverting to a people who in race and language were nearly akin to its former inhabitants.

The settlements of the Gauls are recognized by the torques and the long iron swords which are found in their graves. At Bologna, in the cemeteries of the Certosa and Marzabotto, we have the tombs of the three successive races, Umbrians, Etruscans, and Gauls, all different in character, and easily to be distinguished.

Thus it appears that the fertile plain of the Po was occupied by many successive races, whose descendants may, with greater or less certainty,

be recognized in the present population of Italy. We have first the Palæolithic Iberian savages, mere hunters and probably cannibals, living in caves, ignorant of pottery, whose descendants may be traced in Sardinia and Southern Italy. They were followed, in the early Neolithic period, by the Ligurians, possessed of pottery, but without domestic animals. Their descendants now occupy the Rhætian and Maritime Alps. They were succeeded towards the close of the Neolithic age by the Umbro-Latin race, who lived in huts and pile dwellings instead of caves, who possessed oxen and sheep, canoes and wagons, and who gradually acquired a knowledge of bronze. In the bronze age, sometime before the middle of the eleventh century B. C., they were overwhelmed by the Etruscan inroad, their villages were destroyed, and they fled southward from the invaders. Then, at the close of the fifth century B. C., the Etruscan dominion was destroyed by the Boii and other Gaulish tribes, who were in the iron stage of civilization. Finally came the conquest of the Romans, and afterwards those of the Heruls, Goths, Huns, and Lombards.

The people who lived in the pile dwellings in the valley of the Po, and who are usually called Umbrians, were clearly of the same race as the ancient Romans. The skull is of the same shape, the type of civilization was the same, and Latin and Umbrian were merely dialects of the same language.

Owing to the practice of cremation genuine Roman skulls are rare, and of skulls ostensibly Roman many turn out to be those of freedmen or provincials. But, judging from the few we possess, the shape of the head was almost identical with that of the Umbrians, of the Swiss lacustrine people, and of the Celtic round barrow race of Britain. The great breadth of the Roman skull is well seen in the portrait busts of Tiberius, Nero, Vespasian, Titus, and Marcus Aurelius.

That the Romans were originally in the same pastoral stage of civilization as the Umbrians is shown by the fact that the words for money and property, *pecunia* and *peculium*, are derived from *pecus*, cattle; while the ox, which appears on some early Roman coins, may indicate the fact that the ox was the standard of pecuniary value. The hut urns found in the ancient cemetery of Alba Longa show that the Latins at first lived in huts like those of the Umbrians. The *aedes Vestæ* in the Forum, the most venerable relic of early Rome, was originally a hut of wickerwork and straw, and so was the *casa Romuli* on the Palatine.

The population of Italy has now become so mixed that in many provinces it is difficult to detect and separate the original elements. But the Sardinians and the peasants of Southern Italy still display the primitive Iberian type, and the Greek type survives on the sites of some of the old Greek colonies. For instance, at Naxos and Syracuse about 24 per cent. of the people have blue eyes, while at Palermo, which was never a Greek city, the proportion is less than 1 per cent. In some

parts of Lombardy Teutonic village names are numerous, and Teutonic names, of Gothic or Lombard origin, are common among the nobility. Filiberto, Humberto, and Garibaldi are genuine Teutonic names; so also is that of the Italian seaman, Amerigo Vespucci, who bore the Gothic and Lombardic name of Amarie, which he has given to the New World.

It is curious that America, the continent which has become the patrimony shared nearly equally by the Teutonic and Latin races, should itself bear a Teutonic name, whose Latinized form bears indisputable witness to the Teutonic conquest of the oldest seat of the Latin race in Italy.

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